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T H E
RETORT COURTEOUS;

O R

A CANDID APPEAL TO THE PUBLIC

O N T H E

CONDUCT OF THOMAS LINLEY, Esq,
MANAGER OF DRURY-LANE THEATRE,
TO THE AUTHOR OF DIDO.

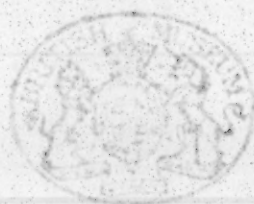
CONTAINING

ORIGINAL LETTERS AND JUST REMARKS
ON THE MANAGER'S ARBITRARY
AND INDEFENSIBLE REJECTION
OF *THAT* TRAGEDY.

By the AUTHOR of the REGISTER-OFFICE.

Nor from my own weak Merits will I draw
The smallest FEAR or DOUBT. SHAKES.
Hear ALL, and then let JUSTICE hold the Scale.
O T V.

L O N D O N:
PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR.
M,DCC,LXXXVII:



T H E
RETORT COURTEOUS;
O R

A CANDID APPEAL to the PUBLIC.

ON a supposition (I may venture to say a certainty) that the Proprietors of Drury-lane Theatre have not us'd me with that candour, which is unquestionably due to an Author, who many years ago contributed his MITE to the entertainment of the Town, I am induc'd to publish the following letters, by way of APPEAL to the Frequenters of the Theatres.

Some of my friends had repeatedly solicited me to offer my tragedy of Dido to the Proprietors of Drury-lane House, as the

part of the Heroine could be so admirably play'd by Mrs. SIDDONS: They at last, as *Polonius* says,

———“ by laboursome petition
“ Wrung from me my flow leave.”

I accordingly sent, above two years ago, the tragedy and a comedy to THOMAS LINLEY, Esquire, the Manager, and with them the following letter.

L E T T E R I.

SIR,

I have taken the liberty of sending a tragedy and a comedy, both of which I flatter myself would make a respectable appearance on your stage. As to the tragedy there can be no doubt of its success; since it was received with applause above seventeen years ago, tho' it was got up in a very slovenly manner, and the Heroine play'd by a Lady, who was never very great in characters *truly-pathetic**. I withdrew the piece on account of an unhappy quarrel with Mr. GARRICK, or it would probably, e'er now, have afforded your celebrated Actress a farther opportunity of displaying her great talents.

* This elegant Actress fell short of her usual excellence in tragic characters of the SOFTER cast.

As the Comedy has never appear'd its success cannot be ascertain'd. However, from the (perhaps) flattering applause, bestow'd upon it by some acknowledg'd judges, I have no reason to doubt of its favourable reception, since the *business* of the piece, with less humour and character than it possesses, would secure its success---add to this, that it can be capitally play'd at your theatre.

I have by me several Dramas of the tragic and comic cast, all of which have had such sanction, as makes me believe that none of them would do your stage the least discredit.

When you have perused the Pieces, I should be proud of an interview; as, I think, it would be for the interest of your theatre to encourage an Author, whose situation is independent, and to whom stage-emoluments are only a secondary consideration.

I shall, with pleasure, wait on you, whenever you shall favour me with a line to that purpose.

Sun-Tavern Fields,
Sept. 23d, 1784.

I am, Sir,
Your's, &c.
JOS. REED.

B

Two days after, both the plays were returned by Mr. Westley, treasurer to the theatre, (tho' I knew not at that time who or what he was) with the ensuing billet.

L E T T E R II.

DRURY-LANE THEATRE.

SIR,

THE Proprietors have directed me to present their compliments, and to acknowledge their obligation for the preference you have given their house, but are of opinion the pieces cannot be produced with advantage to the Theatre.

I am, &c.

25th Sept. 1784.

T. WESTLEY.

From the *sudden* return of the two pieces, I suspected that they had been sent back to me *unread*; as I had been previously informed that every manuscript play, offered to that theatre, was perused by *each* of the Proprietors, before it was accepted or rejected: in consequence of which I wrote to ALL the Proprietors as follows.

L E T T E R III.

GENTLEMEN,

I have received a billet, signed T. Westley, wherein the writer informs me he is directed

to acquaint me, the Proprietors of Drury-lane theatre are of opinion, that my two pieces cannot be produced with advantage to the theatre---I wish that one of you had favoured me with a line on the occasion: Mr. Wesley would not then have been *privy* to your refusal of the pieces, which may possibly be a means of their being rejected *elsewhere*. It is no new thing for a Manager, even without fair examination, to refuse a piece, that has been refused at a rival theatre. If any of you by letter, had offered a daughter as a bride, what would he think of that Gentleman, who, instead of a *private* answer, should send a *servant* to report his refusal?

Had your censure fallen singly on the Comedy, I might *perhaps* have thought it just; but, as poor Dido is involved in your anathema, I cannot help thinking my two dramatic Children are thus cruelly treated, on account of their literary Father. It was many years ago too-truly prophesied, that my quarrel with Mr. GARRICK would be an almost-insuperable obstacle to my success on the stage. However, as I can incontestibly prove *that* gentleman used me most illiberally, it is rather hard that my dramatic Character should

suffer, thro' my lenity of not laying before the public his unjustifiable treatment.

It appears to me very unaccountable that a tragedy, which Mr. GARRICK's *secret influence was not able to damn*, should be rejected, because it was withdrawn by the author, on *promise* that it should re-appear, when it could be exhibited agreeably to his wish.---The story is concisely as follows.

Mr. Garrick, for reasons too tedious to be told, objected to Dido; and, by his authority, kept it off the stage from the year 1761 to 1767. Even then he would not agree to its representation, but on the *hard* condition of bringing it out for Mr. Holland's benefit; hoping its first appearance as a *benefit-play* would effectually cripple it. I should never have consented to Dido's appearance in such *disgraceful* manner, if Mr. Garrick had not assured me, that a sufficient number of nights should be left open for its Run, and at the same time insinuated that another play, on the same subject, had been put into his hands, the success of which the author was willing to try at a benefit.

While the play was in rehearsal, he saw to his *great mortification* that it *would* succeed, and on the day, preceding its first representation, he hurried off to Bath, having either written, or permitted to appear in the Public Advertiser (the then theatrical Gazette) a most scandalous copy of doggerel verses against the tragedy, and without having fixed the second night of its exhibition. Its first appearance was on Saturday, and the only night, in the succeeding week unengaged for a benefit, was Thursday. After the play had met with such applause, I desired it might be given out for Thursday, to which Mr. *George Garrick*, the Deputy-manager, tenaciously objected; alledging he expected a COMMAND for that evening, and that he must hear from his Brother before he fixed the second night. He was, however, over-ruled by Mr. LACY, and the piece was play'd a second time. All the ensuing week was appointed for benefits, except Thursday, and that evening the *Earl of Warwick* was to be play'd at the desire of the honourable CHARLES TOWNSEND, Esq. Chancellor of the Exchequer. On application to that Gentleman, he politely relinquished the requested play; but Mrs. YATES's illness prevented the exhibition of my piece. The

third night therefore could not be fixed till that day month, on account of Passion-week, and the intervening benefits.

After the second night applications were made to me for the purchase of the copy. I wrote to Mr. Garrick then at Bath. He sent me a seemingly-sincere letter, congratulated me on the success of the play, and dissuaded me from publication. He arrived in town before the third representation, and, though the part of Dido was obliged to be play'd by Mrs. William Barry, a second-rate actress, on account of Mrs. Yates's illness, the piece was received with great applause. We then mutually agreed to postpone the farther representation (it being so late as the 14th of May) till the ensuing season, Mr. Garrick promising to get up the piece with all possible advantages; but a revolution happening from the purchase of Covent-Garden Theatre, Dido was deprived of Mr. *Powel* and Mrs. *Yates*.

In October * following Mr. Garrick, without ever consulting me, allotted the parts of *Æneas* and Dido to Reddish and Mrs. *William Barry*. I objected, as Mr. *BARRY* and Mrs. *DANCER* were then engaged at Drury-lane.

* November.

Mr. Garrick, after some warm expressions, at length consented that the two parts should be given to Mr. Barry and Mrs. Dancer, and that the play should be brought out after Christmas. Mr. Barry's affairs in Ireland were in so critical a situation, that he was obliged on a few hours' notice to set out for Dublin. In his absence the part of Dido was given to Mrs. Dancer, who expressed a great liking to it. Mr. Barry, on his return, was applied to about studying *Æneas*. He promised to do it, if I would put off the play to another season, alledging he had no leisure for study till the theatrical vacation*. I would not consent, and desired a positive answer. He then told me he had neither read the part nor the play. I gave him a copy of the tragedy, and a meeting between us was appointed in his dressing-room the next time he played. We met accordingly. After many hesitations, shufflings, and ridiculous objections he declined the part. His objections were easily refuted, and so confused was his behaviour, that I must have been blind, not to have seen he was influenced by Mr. Garrick. I then asked him if he had any objection to Mrs.

* He afterwards studied a new part in *Zenobia* that season.

Dancer's playing Dido. He assured me she would never play the character, unless he was in the piece. The play was therefore withdrawn on Mr. Garrick's *promise* that it should re-appear, whenever I should think it could be satisfactorily performed.

I was so highly irritated at Mr. Garrick's duplicity, that I wrote a narrative of our quarrel from its first rise, which happened in December 1759, on account of the REGISTER-OFFICE ; containing all the Letters and Occurrences that passed between us. I should have published it, had I not been pressingly dissuaded by my friend Mr. Holland, who was at that time in expectation of purchasing a share in the theatre. I now repent that I suffered myself to be dissuaded, as the narrative would have excited the curiosity and attention of the literary world, and have convinced the public of the illiberal usage, I met with from that great Actor and Manager. It may not yet be too late ; for if Dido, must be denied an appearance on the stage, its injured Author has surely a right to vindicate his dramatic character by Publication.

From the above true state of the case, I would ask if a play, that succeeded against all

the uncandid practices of a great Manager---a play, that was got up in a careless and slovenly manner---a play, that was exhibited without a single new dress or scene---a play, that was kept lingering near *seven* weeks from its first to its third representation, and abused in the Manager's Paper *before* it made its appearance on the stage—I say, Gentlemen, I would ask, if it can be fairly supposed that a play, which succeeded under all these disadvantages, could fail of success, when properly exhibited?

Suffer me, Gentlemen, to relate one instance of prepossession against Dido. The celebrated author of *Tristram Shandy* was at its first representation, and, when the curtain dropp'd, being ask'd his opinion of the piece, replied in his humourous way, “ I look upon it as a theatrical Take-in.” The Gentleman, who ask'd the question, answer'd, “ I'm surpriz'd to hear this! you seem'd pleased with the representation”—“ And was truly so,” return'd the Wit: “ I only expected to see a *mere benefit-play*, and it has turned out one of the best new tragedies I ever saw.”

You think, Gentlemen, that *Dido* cannot be produc'd with advantage to your theatre. Far be it from me to wish you should be losers by any performance of mine. I think there is a moral certainty, that *Dido* will have a Run of nine nights. If, therefore, you will produce the receipts of the managers' six nights, for any new tragedy you have exhibited, since the commencement of your theatrical reign, I don't desire to pocket a shilling, till such sum has been received, though you should agree to get up the piece even in this parliamentary vacation. As parliament does not meet till late in January, depend on't, Gentlemen, you will have great need of novelty, much novelty, to bring good houses.

To guard you from every risk, I beg leave to propose a new plan. If you will fix a fair price for the use of your theatre nine nights in November, I should be glad to contract with you. Nay, Gentlemen, I will even extend the number of nights to eighteen, and play *Dido* and a Comedy alternately. I have other comedies besides that you have seen. I will lodge in your hands Govern-

ment-Securities to the amount of the stipulated sum.

I beg the favour of an answer, and am,

Gentlemen,

Sept. 30, 1784.

Your's &c.

Mr. Linley favour'd me with the following answer.

L E T T E R IV.

Oct. 5th, 1784.

SIR,

The Letter, sent to you from Drury-lane Theatre in the names of the Proprietors, was an official one, agreeable to a rule of that house, when any pieces, presented there for performance, are returned. Mr. Westley is a person they confide in, and you may rely upon his secrecy respecting the business in question.

The further propositions you make are so contrary to the general order of business in that theatre, that they cannot be accepted.

I am, SIR,

C 2

Your's, &c.

As I found nothing could be done with Mr. Linley, I wrote as follows to ALBANY WALLIS, Esquire, one of Mr. Garrick's Executors, on a supposition that he would shew my letter to the Proprietors.

L E T T E R V.

SIR,

Last night I resolved to write to my friend, Mr. J——— H———, who has been long acquainted with you, to accompany me to your house, as I have a matter of some consequence to impart to you : however, on farther rumination, it appeared to me more adviseable to open the business by letter, as the affair might, by that means, be kept the more secret.—But to the purpose.

On the 23d day of September, I sent to Mr. Linley a tragedy and a comedy, which were returned by Mr. Westley, the treasurer of Drury-lane theatre, with a short billet, informing me the Proprietors were of opinion, that my pieces could not be produc'd with advantage to the theatre.—As Mr. Westley's letter was dated on the 25th of September, I think it was hardly possible that both pieces could be read (at least be duly and deliberately

read) by *all* the Proprietors. In short, I cannot help thinking, that both the pieces were so *hastily* rejected, because they have the misfortune to be *mine*.—I impute their rejection *solely* to an unhappy quarrel, which subsisted between the celebrated Roscius and me.—Nay, I am almost of opinion they were return'd to me *unread*.

As to the comedy, I can only say, it has had the sanction of some acknowledged judges of the drama; and, were it not my own, I would not scruple to assert, it has equal, if not superior merit to any of the comic pieces produc'd at Drury-lane, since the commencement of their proprietorship; Mr. Sheridan's excepted.

As to the tragedy, viz. *Dido*, I may, without the least imputation of vanity, stand up in its defence, because it has had the sanction of the Public. It was exhibited three nights above seventeen years ago, and received with applause, in spite of—I am sorry to add—*Mr. Garrick's secret influence to cripple it*. From your intimacy with that inimitable Actor, I must suppose you cannot be a stranger to the cause of my withdrawing *Dido* the ensuing winter.—Mr. Garrick's

behaviour was such, that I wrote a pamphlet,
with the following title and motto :

THEATRICAL DUPLICITY:

O R

A GENUINE NARRATIVE

O F T H E

CONDUCT of DAVID GARRICK, Esq.

T O

JOSEPH REED on his Tragedy of DIDO:

C O N T A I N I N G

All the Letters, and several Conversations,
which pass'd between the Manager, Author,
and Others. on that Subject.

I will a round unvarnish'd *tale* deliver—

Nothing extenuate,

Nor set down aught in *malice*.

OTHELLO.

Foul deeds will rise,

Tho' all the earth o'erwhelm them.

HAMLET.

I read a great part of the narrative to Mr. Holland, who, in a very pressing manner, dissuaded me from publishing it. I now repent that I did not publish it at that time, at least not during Mr. Garrick's life, as I am fully persuaded my dramatic character hath greatly suffer'd, thro' my omission of laying before the world, a series of facts, which bear hard on Mr. Garrick's memory as a Manager, and which not a little affect it as a Man.

On the 30th of September I wrote to the Proprietors, and went to the Treasurer's office after the play, in expectation of seeing Mr. Westley, whose absence induced me to leave the letter with a young man, desiring him to give it to the Treasurer; with a charge to deliver it in the presence of *all*, at least a majority of the Proprietors. In my letter I dropp'd all defence of the comedy, but defended Dido in such a manner, as must have procur'd its exhibition, had not there been a strong prepossession against the play in the case. I made the Proprietors two offers; the first, to allow them to receive (before I pocketed one shilling) a sum equal to the amount of the Managers' six nights of any new tragedy they had produc'd;

the second, to hire, at a fair price, their theatre nine nights, for the exhibition of Dido ; or eighteen, to play the tragedy, and a comedy alternately ; with a proposal of lodging in their hands Government Securities to the amount of the stipulated sum—Both these offers they have rejected.

I am therefore under the disagreeable necessity of publishing the Narrative, to convince the literary world, that I am not destitute of abilities to contribute to the entertainment of the Public.

You may possibly think that I have *not* written the pamphlet alluded to, and that I have only made mention of it *in terrorem*. If such your opinion, I will, whenever desir'd, read the Narrative to you, or to any person you shall appoint. I am sorry that no other alternative remains ; but as I have dramatic pieces by me, which, if play'd with tolerable success, will bring me three thousand pounds, or upwards, my duty, as a father of three children, (tho' I am in a state of independency) certainly obliges me to make use of such expedient.—When I publish the Narrative, I intend to publish Dido. I am not without

hopes of having permission to dedicate the tragedy to a Great Personage.

You may also think, that my publication of the Narrative will fail of credit, as Mr. Garrick is no more.—Don't deceive yourself in that particular. His very letters (had I not living witnesses of his duplicity) would corroborate the facts, I have stated therein. I believe my friend H——— will assure you, that my veracity is not to be question'd. However, to remove every doubt, I shall prefix to the Narrative an affidavit of the truth of its contents: Nay, probably, my late letter to the Proprietors of Drury-lane Theatre.

You may farther think, that an attack on so great a character as Mr. Garrick may make me many literary enemies.—Even in that case, how shall I be a loser? Mr. Garrick's conduct hath blasted my reputation, as a dramatic writer, and the far greater part of my productions is dramatic. If, therefore, I have nothing to *hope* from the stage, I have surely nothing to *fear* from the partisans of Mr. Garrick.

If you are unacquainted with Mr. Garrick's dissingenuous conduct, respecting Dido, I

could wish you would desire the Proprietors to shew you my letter, as it contains a concise account of his duplicity.——I observe from a recent advertisement, * that an intimacy exists between you.

You have been characteriz'd to me a sensible, and (what is still more to your credit) an honest man: And as you have been the temporary guardian of Mr. Garrick's property, you may prove a guardian to his character, by preventing an injured Author's appeal to the public: an appeal absolutely necessary to restore his literary reputation, which is almost annihilated by Mr. Garrick's disingenuous conduct.

You may ask "How can I serve you in this affair?"——The question answers itself.

I beg the favour of a line from you, and am,

SIR,

OEt. 12, 1784.

Your's, &c.

Mr. Wallis wrote to my friend H——, who waited on him at his house in Norfolk-street;

* For the sale of Renter's Shares.

at which interview, he express'd a desire of seeing me. Two days after, Mr. H—— and I paid him a visit. At this meeting I produc'd the Narrative, and read several pages, by which (I presume) that Gentleman was convinc'd I had not attack'd Mr. Garrick thro' a spirit of malignity, but thro' a principle of self-defence. — I inform'd him if the Managers persisted in their cruel resolution of rejecting my play, that I was in hopes, thro' the means of a baronet, (whose name I mention'd) of getting the Narrative and Tragedy introduced to MAJESTY. Mr. Wallis was pleased to tell me he would speak to Mr. Linley that the play might have another reading. I therefore sent him Dido with the following letter.

L E T T E R VI.

SIR,

I have sent you, agreeable to promise, my tragedy. Your own feelings, will enable you to determine, whether or not, the Public will be under *greater* obligation to the Proprietors of Drury-lane theatre, by their receiving, or rejecting a piece, written more from the *heart* than the *head*.

D 2

I shall send for *Dido* on Monday next. If you should not, in that interval, have time to peruse the piece, I have no objection to its remaining with you a day or two longer.

I thank you for the indulgence of so long a visit, and am,

SIR,

Oct. 22d. 1784.

Your's, &c.

In answer to this letter, Mr. Wallis inform'd me that he had spoke to the Managers, who promised the play should have a second reading, but they could not fix the time for that purpose.——He therefore return'd the play, not chusing to leave it in their hands without my consent. Three days after, I again sent him the piece, and wrote as follows.

L E T T E R VII.

SIR,

I am extremely oblig'd to you, for procuring a promise of a second perusal of *Dido*, but if the piece is to be submitted to the judgment of the person, who has already read it, I must naturally suppose he will abide by his late opinion. A physician, who has declared

his patient incurable, will hardly be induc'd to speak favourably of his case, while the *same symptoms* continue——Suffer me to give, what you Gentlemen of the Law call a *case in point*, by an extract from my Narrative.

“ I wrote the tragedy of Dido, in the
 “ year 1760. In September, it was intro-
 “ duc'd to the late Lady Southwell, who
 “ warmly recommended it to her Lord, and
 “ desired him to use his utmost endeavours
 “ to get it upon the stage. His Lordship gave
 “ the performance to Mr. Victor for his opi-
 “ nion. Mr. Victor wrote to his Lordship
 “ as follows.”

“ My Lord,

“ I return the tragedy of Dido, with ma-
 “ ny thanks to your Lordship, for the fa-
 “ vour of reading it. I am certain the Au-
 “ thor is a man of genius: there are unques-
 “ tionable marks of it in this tragedy. I am
 “ sorry his labour was not employ'd on a bet-
 “ ter story. Your Lordship must remember
 “ I objected to *That*, when you put this play
 “ into my hands. It is a subject every school-
 “ boy is acquainted with, and an insurmounta-

“ ble injury to any tragedy, to have the
 “ Event. (which is call'd the *Catastrophe*)
 “ known to every auditor before the play
 “ opens.”

“ I am,

My Lord,

(With the greatest respect)

Your Lordship's most obliged

Humble Servant,

B. VICTOR.”

This letter, on account of its *false* criticism,
 is almost too contemptible to appear in my
 Narrative: I have notwithstanding animad-
 verted on it, as follows.

“ I cannot pass over this letter, without
 “ observing that Mr. Victor may be equally
 “ sorry, that the labour of the Authors of
 “ Cato, Coriolanus, Julius Cæsar, King Ri-
 “ chard the Third, the Earl of Essex, Jane
 “ Shore, and several other tragedies, was not
 “ employ'd upon a better story, as they are

“ all equally liable to his objection. If we are
 “ ever disappointed in the Event (which this
 “ superficial critic, *impertinently* tells a No-
 “ bleman, is call'd the *Catastrophe*) of a tra-
 “ gedy, it is when the piece ends *happily*; for
 “ we as naturally expect *Death* to be the
 “ Event of tragedy, as we do *Marriage* to be
 “ the Event of comedy.”

Tho' Mr. Victor was not a little rallied on account of the above letter, he tenaciously adher'd to his opinion, and, even after three audiences had given the lie to his *insurmountable* objection, this pseudo critic, with a truly-pedantic obstinacy, justifies his opinion in his history of the Stage, and endeavours to depreciate Dido, to gratify his own spleen, or in hopes of pleasing Mr. Garrick, to whom he was (if I may use the expression) indebted for his daily bread*.

As the Gentleman, who read Dido, has not particulariz'd his objections, it is impossible for me to refute them. It cannot be denied that Dido was received with applause; and, since its exhibition, I can truly assert, that the

* Mr. Victor was, at that time, Treasurer to Drury-lane Theatre.

manuscript has been read by, at least, fifty Gentlemen of literary abilities; many of whom have paid me the highest compliments on its imagery, pathos, and simplicity of style. I can, therefore, only assign conjectural reasons for the censure, lately pass'd on the piece. The Gentleman was, probably, a *warm admirer* of Mr. Garrick: If so, he can hardly be a *friend* to me, on account of my (suppos'd-blameable) conduct to that inimitable Actor. He may also be one of the many critics, who prefer a florid high-sounding style to a simple one. Dido will, therefore, hardly suit his critical taste. I hope I may be allow'd to assert, in defence of my tragedy, that *Isabella, Oroonoko, Jane Shore, and Venice Preserv'd* owe their greatest success to simplicity of diction.——Every tragic Author, who hopes to *reach the heart*, should have in view, that admirable precept of *Horace*,

Tragicus plerum que dolet *Sermone pedestri*.

I have said that many Gentlemen have pass'd encomiums on Dido. This, you may reply, is mere *ipse dixit*, unsupported by proof. I will therefore give you a *public testimony*, which will overthrow the censure of

Mr. Victor, and the Gentleman who has lately read my piece. It is an extract from *Biographia Dramatica*, the reputed compilers of which are Mr. *Steevens* and Mr. *Malone*, two ingenious Gentlemen, who about four years ago published an edition of *Shakespeare*. Their characters, as judges of dramatic literature, are sufficiently known. I have not the least personal, or epistolary acquaintance with either of them: it cannot therefore be suppos'd, they meant to flatter me by such extract. I should not have been able to produce it, if it had not yesterday been given me by a Gentleman, who visited me, on a report that *Dido* had been refus'd by the *Drury-lane Managers*. The extract runs thus: viz.

“ *Dido*.—Trag. in imitation of *Shakespeare's* style, by *Joseph Reed*. Acted at *Drury-lane*, 1767. Not printed.”

“ This tragedy was first perform'd for the benefit of Mr. *Holland*, and twice afterwards; when it was each time received with applause. It was intended to have been reviv'd the ensuing season; but the Author and Manager disagreeing in some particulars,

“ the copy was withdrawn, and it has
 “ since lain dormant.—It would be a poor
 “ compliment to the Author, to observe that
 “ many pieces of inferior merit have been
 “ since successfully represented.”

BIOGRAPHIA DRAMATICA. Vol. 2. Page 86. C

I have not the book by me. If the extract be *unfair*, it is the fault of my friend, not mine.—This testimony, in my opinion, appears decisive.

Had you not mentioned, that the Proprietors could not fix a day for the second perusal of *Dido*, I should have sent you the manuscript on Tuesday. I could wish to be on a friendly footing with the Gentlemen, as I think I could almost convince them, that *some* of my pieces would bring no disgrace on their theatre. S

Your farther services in this affair will be a lasting obligation, conferr'd on,

SIR,

Thursday-night,

Oct. 28th.

Your's &c.

Mr. Wallis inform'd me, he was afraid he could not procure a second reading of *Dido*

very soon, as Mr. *Sheridan*, who promis'd to get it read, was gone out of town for a month at least—I answered him thus.

L E T T E R VIII.

SIR,

Your letter, tho' dated on Saturday, did not reach me till Tuesday night. To be kept in suspense, till Mr. *Sheridan's* return to town, is a distressing circumstance. That Gentleman, if he would have taken the trouble of perusing *Dido*, might have put an end to the dispute. His judgment in dramatic composition is unquestionable. Tho' he has in his *Critic* so wittily ridicul'd tragedy, I am convinc'd, from his fine feelings, that he would not even wish to banish it from the stage. His omission of naming a person to peruse *Dido*, before he went into the country, has not a favourable appearance; as he can be no stranger to the anxiety, which must necessarily attend an Author, while he continues in a state of suspense.

From the decisive opinion, which the ingenious compilers of *Biographia Dramatica* have given of *Dido*, it would scarce appear unnatural in me, to suppose the Proprietors have

rejected the tragedy, more on account of *private* dislike to the Author, than from a *real* dislike of the piece.

As I made no secret of declaring to many of my friends in the summer, that I should offer Dido to the proprietors of Drury-lane theatre this season, I am daily teiz'd with the disagreeable salutation, " Can it be true that " the Managers have rejected Dido?"——The matter is therefore come to a crisis——The tragedy must either be play'd or publish'd this season, or my dramatic character (respecting the many pieces I have by me) is entirely blasted.

I told you I had some expectations of getting my Narrative and Tragedy introduc'd to a GREAT PERSONAGE, and at the same time inform'd you of the means to effect it. A shorter (tho' apparently less-successful) mode has been pointed out to me, which is my sending the tragedy to—* * * *

* * * * A COMMONER of great influence.—I am now almost convinc'd, that an application to the right honourable Gentleman would not have succeeded. I have, therefore, suppress'd such part of the letter, as relates to Him, and the means by which I hop'd to interest Him in my favour.

As I mentioned an Epitaph, (which in all probability you have not read) I hope you will not think me impertinent in requesting your acceptance of such literary trifle. It may prove the fugitive entertainment of a few idle minutes, if a Gentleman of your professional engagements may be suppos'd to have any idle ones.

I have a copy of the tragedy. I therefore wish the piece to remain with you, that it may be ready for a perusal, in case the Proprietors should appoint another person to read it. However, as the season is advancing, I have no time to lose. It would hardly be prudent in me to remain *unresolv'd* and *unprepar'd* till Mr. *Sheridan's* arrival in town, as his stay in the country may be longer than he expected, and as transcript of the Narrative and Tragedy will take up no little time. The person, conditionally engaged for that purpose, must transcribe it *in my own house*. He can only attend occasionally an hour or two in the evenings: I must therefore reasonably suppose, he will not be able to finish the two pieces in less than a month. He shall not, however, make a beginning till Monday sen'night, in which interval, I have some hopes

of hearing the Proprietors' resolution, as you have kindly intimated in your letter, that you will speak to them about the tragedy.

I cannot conclude, without returning you my most sincere thanks for your endeavours to serve me—I also hope you will generously pardon the trouble, I have given you on this occasion.

I am, With due gratitude,

Nov. 4, 1784.

SIR, Your's, &c.

Mr. Wallis acquainted me, that he had attempted to procure the reading of the play, and intimated, that, if no better luck should attend him when Mr. *Sheridan* came to town, he should not be able to render me any service—About a fortnight after I wrote to him the following letter.

L E T T E R IX.

SIR,

I should have written to you the last week, if I had not determined to take the collective opinions of some friends on this embarrassing affair.

I am advised by all, to whom I opened my case, to commence literary hostilities on the Managers of Drury-lane theatre; but as I would yet willingly make them my friends, (and, if I am not extravagantly flatter'd, it will be their interest to secure my friendship) I shall wait the issue of Mr. *Sheridan's* coming to town.

It seems to some of my friends beyond a doubt, that the Proprietors are determined to clip my dramatic wings, or they would have soften'd their refusal of *Dido* and the Comedy, by an offer of looking at some other of my pieces. I could, among my other productions, furnish them with a greater variety, than a single five-act piece could afford. I mean a three-act comedy and a mock-tragedy, which I was, a few years ago, advised to start against Mr. *Sheridan's Critic*. However, as the Gentlemen seem to treat me so cavalierly, it would, I presume, be in vain to make them such offer.

Some of my friends have intimated, that if the Proprietors had been willing to serve me, they would have sent the piece to Mrs. *SID-
DONS*, as a test of its merit; adding, if she should sufficiently feel the part of the heroine,

it is impossible the play should fail; especially as it would be so strongly supported by the characters of Æneas, Narbal, and Achates. One Gentleman severely observed, that the fate of a late comedy * (to mention no other theatrical miscarriages) was a convincing proof of the *insufficiency* of the critical abilities of the person, appointed for the perusal of pieces tender'd to Drury-lane theatre. He even offered to wait on Mr. Linley in behalf of my tragedy, but, as I would not wish to give offence to that Gentleman, or his Brother-Proprietors, I declined the offer.

In short, it seems the general opinion of all the Gentlemen whom I have consulted, that the Proprietors, for some *private* reasons, seem, at all events, determin'd on the non-admission of any of my pieces on their stage.

In consequence of my friends' advice, I am therefore determin'd to strain every nerve to have Dido exhibited, tho' I should even sacrifice the whole profits of the piece to effect it.

If I should be under the disagreeable necessity of publishing my Narrative, I am

* The Piece was damn'd.

advis'd, by way of preparing the Public, to print the letter I sent to the Proprietors. That letter, however, would be imperfect, unless it were followed by those I have written to you, with your answers; and, as your behaviour to me has been so open and liberal, I could not even reconcile to myself the idea of such proceeding, without having previously obtained your permission to lay them before the Public.

As Dido has been refus'd, I have certainly a right to know what have been the objections to the piece. Would Mr. Garrick have denied an Author that satisfaction? No: he would (if desir'd) have pointed out his objections, and endeavoured to have convinc'd him of the improbability of the success of the piece. Why then am I denied such satisfaction? The tragedy, above seventeen years ago, had the sanction of the Public. Is the Public, since that time, grown more sensible and refin'd in tragic taste?—I apprehend not—The town, I may venture to assert, since Mr. Garrick quitted the stage, has patiently suffered some tragedies to pass, which, while he continued Manager, would scarce have been

suffered to have made their theatrical appearance a second time, and which would have been a disgrace to Drury-lane theatre in his reign.

Friday-night,
Nov. 19th. 1784.

I am, Sir,
Your's, &c.

P. S. I should be obliged to you for a line, when Mr. Sheridan has read, or procur'd a reading of *Dido*, till when it may remain in your hands.

Here ends the epistolary correspondence ; to which I beg leave to add another public testimony of the merits of *Dido*, given by Mr. Garrick's biographer, Mr. Thomas Davies, whose judgment in dramatic composition was indisputable. In his life of the *British Roscius*, which was revis'd (some say partly written) by Dr. *Johnson*, he speaks thus of my tragedy.

“ *Dido*, a tragedy, written by Mr. Reed,
“ a rope maker, was acted for the benefit of
“ Mr. HOLLAND. It was thought an unusual
“ favour, to give the *first* night of a new play
“ to an Actor ; nor does the public *know*, why

“ Dido was *not* play’d *more* than three nights.
 “ If the Managers pleaded, that the season
 “ was too far advanc’d to act it successively,
 “ as was usual in other new pieces, it might
 “ have been resum’d the next winter; and
 “ that it merited such favour, may be pre-
 “ sum’d from the applause bestow’d upon it.
 “ The Author is certainly a man of genius—
 “ His farce of the Register-Office contains a
 “ variety of characters aptly drawn, and it has
 “ met with great, and deserved applause.

Life of David Garrick, Esq. Vol. 2. p. 126.

Tho’ Mr. Davies says, “ Nor does the
 “ Public *know* why Dido was *not* play’d
 “ *more* than three nights,” yet Mr. Davies
 himself *knew* very well why Dido was *not*
 play’d *more* than three nights.—The reader
 may naturally exclaim, “ Davies was univer-
 “ sally reputed an honest man; then why
 “ did he leave the Public in the dark in that
 “ particular?”—Let me offer a conjectural ex-
 cuse in favour of poor Davies—might he not
 thus reason with himself?——“ I am now
 “ writing in praise of Mr. Garrick, and should
 “ I *fairly* acquaint the Public with the true
 “ cause of Dido’s non-appearance the next

“ winter, I shall fix an indelible stigma on the
 “ character of my *histrionic* Hero.”

If the Register-Office deserve the above character, why have the Managers *suppress'd* its exhibition?—As Hamlet says, “ There
 “ is something in this *more than natural*, if
 “ philosophy could find it out.”

To throw some small light on this mystery, I beg leave to inform my readers, that the Register-Office would have been *got up* a few weeks ago, if its revival had not been unexpectedly *prohibited* without any reason assign'd. A whisper, circulated behind the Curtain, ascribes the prohibition to Miss POPE's excellence in the character of Mrs. *Doggerel*, as it might possibly be a means of lessening her theatrical consequence in TILBURIANA. If the revival of the farce has been prevented on such account, I must necessarily esteem the prohibition a very flattering compliment.

The person, who was to have transcribed the Narrative and Tragedy, was detain'd in the country till the middle of December; and three days before his arrival in town the Gentleman, through whose means I hop'd to get the two pieces introduc'd to MAJESTY,

had obtain'd *leave of absence*. I therefore dropp'd all thoughts of a fresh application, and determin'd to publish, in case the Manager, on the second reading of *Dido*, still refus'd its exhibition. On Mr. Sheridan's coming to town, I fully expected the promis'd reading would take place; but --- I am quite in the dark for what reason such promise remains to this hour *unfulfilled*.

From Mr. Linley's postponing the second reading of *Dido*, may it not be presum'd that he was *afraid* such reading would turn out in favour of the piece? Has not this breach of promise a strong appearance of resentment against me? But in what have I offended him? I can safely declare in nothing, unless by calling in question the abilities, or integrity of his Favourite, the *profound* Critic. I am indeed of opinion, that the decline of dramatic genius, since Mr. Sheridan quitted the Management, and refus'd the inspection of pieces offer'd to Drury-lane theatre, may be *fairly* ascrib'd to Mr. Linley's want of necessary discernment in dramatic composition; but as I never publish'd my sentiments on that occasion, I cannot have given him any just cause of offence. --- Suffer me to assign a

presumptive reason or two, in support of the above opinion.

As Mr. Linley confesses his own want of judgment in the drama, (a defect scarce-pardonable in a Manager) he must be necessitated to submit the fate of pieces, offer'd to the stage, to the decision of a person of known, or presum'd abilities. But how can he be sure that such person (tho' a competent judge) will always act with due impartiality? Private friendship, or private pique to an Author may either bias his judgment, or warp his integrity. That Mr. Linley has been unfortunate in his choice of a dramatic Cenfor is too-evident. Who, or what this Cenfor is I don't pretend to know, but it is highly probable that he must either be a Person, who writes for the Stage, or an Actor. If the former, the caution given by our immortal Bard is not inapplicable; viz. "Let
" no such man be trusted." His opinion ought not to be decisive; as he may reject a piece of real merit, through a principle of literary jealousy, or recommend a flimsy play, as a foil to his own productions. If the latter, he is equally improper for a Cenfor; for though the piece may contain a part fitted to his theatrical powers, it may also contain a character, in which another performer would

cut a more capital figure. In such case, it is natural to suppose that he will reject the play.

This was the failing of our celebrated Roscius. Among other pieces, he rejected *Douglas*, and *Cleone*, on account of the superiority of the female characters. Nay, I am almost convinc'd (and in such opinion I am not singular) that he refus'd *Dido* for a similar reason. He remark'd, that "the play was written for the woman" (Mrs. CIBBER) "and that the men"—I ask pardon for using the coarse expression—"were only Sh—ts—cks." Yet *Powell*, *Holland*, and *Bensley* found no want of applause in their respective parts—Let me observe, that Mr. Garrick play'd in *new* pieces, when *Dido* was first offer'd to him. Had he not seen the tragedy till his return from *Italy*, it is more than probable that he would not have rejected it.

I waited till the close of the season, in hopes of hearing from the Manager during the theatrical vacation. In the beginning of August, I patch'd up this Appeal, and resolv'd to publish it on the very day, announc'd for the opening of Drury-lane theatre, if my tragedy was not accepted.

About a week before the commencement of the last season, I visited Mr. Wallis, and told him I had prepared for an attack. He dissuaded me from publication, by telling me he would, on Mr. Sheridan's coming to town, talk the affair over with him—I even suffer'd the season to slip over without any farther application, so great is my dislike to solicit favours—I had seriously ruminated on the consequence of my intended publications—By printing the tragedy, I clearly saw it would become public property, and might be exhibited at any patent theatre, by (what is call'd) *prescriptive right*, by which I should be depriv'd of the emoluments of representation—This loss, however, I laid no great stress on—I was also apprehensive that the tragedy would be, with the utmost severity, attack'd by some hireling literary assassins. The *profound* Critic, on whose judgment Mr. Linley so blindly depends, and whom I have reason to suppose my implacable enemy, would doubtless, in justification of his *given* opinion, make use of some expedient pecuniary, or theatrical * to have the reputation of my tragedy decried, or blasted.

* The freedom of the House.

In such embarrassing situation I shew'd the manuscript of this pamphlet to a few Gentlemen, on whose judgment and integrity I could rely ; but even here I found a contrariety of opinions. Some strongly advis'd me to send it to the Press, by way of prelude to the publication of the Narrative and Tragedy, as the affair between Mr. Linley and me was evidently the cause of the Public. Others dissuaded me, as it would probably make the Manager my enemy, and consequently more averse to the reception of any other of my pieces, which might be offer'd to Drury-lane theatre.

I still continued irresolute, in hopes that matters might be accommodated ; and, to leave no stone unturn'd for effecting such purpose, I even *condescended* to request the Manager's permission that one of the principal Performers might have Dido for a benefit. This I could do with no other view, than in hopes of *convincing* him, that the tragedy had sufficient merit to establish its existence as a STOCK-PLAY. To this *humiliating* Request, (though I did not even desire either new dress or scene) I am sorry to say Mr. Linley absolutely refus'd his

consent; which is perhaps a greater stretch of theatrical DESPOTISM, than has been exercised by any Manager during the present century.

How striking the contrast between Mr. Linley's CRUELTY to me, and his PARTIALITY to another Dramatist! It would almost puzzle an able Casuist to decide in which particular the Manager's conduct merits the severer reprehension—Two years ago, a tragedy and a comedy (each of five acts written by the *same* Author) were brought out at Drury-lane theatre—Did Mr. Garrick, though a known dupe to flattery, ever grant a similar indulgence to any of his dramatic Sycophants? Never. He knew that such unwarrantable preference would be look'd upon as an opening to a monopoly of stage-emoluments, by which genius would be discourag'd, and an act of injustice to Authors, the representation of whose pieces would be thereby procrastinated——The *true* motive of Mr. Linley's partiality to this Gentleman is not publicly known, though many shrewd remarks were made on it, little to the credit of either Author or Manager.

Notwithstanding Mr. Linley's unjustifiable refusal of the above request, I should possibly still have hesitated in respect of publication, if a Gentleman of his acquaintance had not lately hinted to one of my friends, that Dido would not be accepted at Drury-lane theatre, on account of my quarrel with Mr. Garrick. My Friend indeed ascribes this piece of unparalleled injustice to the *profound* Critic's influence over Mr. Linley. In either case, I can hardly suppose, after the Manager's obstinate perseverance in refusing the tragedy, that any real Well-wisher to dramatic genius, and the cause of literary liberty will blame me for publication.

I might here close my APPEAL, in *full assurance* that every impartial reader will imagine, I have been treated with unprecedented cruelty in the ARBITRARY REJECTION of my tragedy, to say nothing of the comedy. To convince the world that I do not assert this through the usual partiality of the Poet, I beg leave to produce a CONCLUSIVE AUTHORITY from a great dramatic Genius and able Manager.

Mr. COLMAN (we are assur'd in the preface to *Albina*) thus express'd himself on a similar occasion——“ Where an Author of reputation thinks proper to bring me a Piece, I don't think I have a RIGHT to deliberate——I am only the Midwife, and give it a safe delivery to the world——“ Where one does not know a Writer it is different.”



E N D.

7